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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING
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TAGS: [FR](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANESE DIPLOMAT THINKS HIZBALLAH HAS THE UPPER
HAND

REF: BEIRUT 3766
CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT,
REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

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11. (C) SUMMARY: LEBANESE A/DCM GHADY EL-KHOURY TOLD US
DECEMBER 6 HE BELIEVED HIZBALLAH HAD THE UPPER HAND IN THE
CURRENT CRISIS IN LEBANON THANKS IN LARGE PART TO ITS
DOMINATION OF LEBANON'S SHI'A COMMUNITY. EL-KHOURY ASSESSED
THAT MANY LEBANESE SHIITES WITH NO LOVE OF NASRALLAH'S
IDEOLOGY -- INCLUDING MEMBERS OF NABIH BERRI'S OWN FAMILY --
HAD CONCLUDED THAT SUPPORTING HIZBALLAH WAS THE BEST WAY TO
ENSURE THEIR INTERESTS IN A VOLATILE POLITICAL CLIMATE. HE
SUGGESTED THAT THE BEST WAY TO ERODE HIZBALLAH'S POWER BASE
WAS TO BRING IT BACK INTO THE GOVERNMENT, WHERE IT WOULD
INEVITABLY BE TARNISHED BY WHAT HE TERMED "LEBANON'S CULTURE
OF CORRUPTION." EL-KHOURY EXCULPATED MICHEL AOUN OF ANY
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POLITICAL IMPASSE AND ARGUED THAT
AOUN'S SUPPORT AMONG LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WAS GREATER THAN
COMMONLY BELIEVED BY EXTERNAL OBSERVERS. HOWEVER, HE
CONCEDED THAT AOUN WAS BADLY DAMAGED BY THE ASSASSINATION OF
PIERRE GEMAYEL AND ADMITTED HE WAS UNSURE WHETHER
HIZBALLAH/SYRIA WOULD EVER ALLOW AOUN TO BECOME PRESIDENT.
EL-KHOURY SUGGESTED FARID AL-KHAZAN, DEAN OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT, WOULD MAKE AN

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EXCELLENT COMPROMISE CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY. END
SUMMARY.

HIZBALLAH IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT?

12. (C) LEBANESE A/DCM GHADY EL-KHOURY, IN A DECEMBER 6
MEETING WITH NEA WATCHER, EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT HIZBALLAH
CURRENTLY ENJOYED THE UPPER HAND IN THE CURRENT LEBANESE
CRISIS (REFTEL). EL-KHOURY (A CHRISTIAN) ATTRIBUTED
HIZBALLAH'S STRENGTH TO ITS DOMINATION OF THE SHI'A POLITICAL
SCENE. TO ILLUSTRATE THE IN-ROADS HIZBALLAH HAD MADE AMONG
SECULAR SHI'A AND SUPPORTERS OF THE SMALLER AMAL PARTY,
EL-KHOURY RECOUNTED A RECENT DISCUSSION WITH A NEPHEW OF
AMAL-LEADER NABIH BERRI, IN WHICH THE NEPHEW EVINCED A
STARTLING DEVOTION TO HIZBALLAH LEADER HASSAN NASRALLAH. "I
WAS REALLY SURPRISED," SAID EL-KHOURY, WHO ADDED THAT HE WAS
EVEN MORE SHOCKED BY HIS WIFE MONA'S ACCOUNT OF A RECENT
LUNCH WITH NABIH BERRI'S DAUGHTER, IN THE COURSE OF WHICH
BERRIS DAUGHTER CASUALLY MENTIONED "HIZBALLAHS PEOPLE" IN
THE LEBANESE MFA. WHEN AN INCREDULOUS MONA EL-KHOURY ASKED
WHO HIZBALLAH HAD WORKING INSIDE THE MFA, BERRI'S DAUGHTER

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QUIETLY POINTED TO HERSELF.

13. (C) GIVEN HIZBALLAH'S STRENGTH, EL-KHOURY ASSESSED THAT THE ORGANIZATION WAS LESS BEHOLDEN TO SYRIA THAN IS GENERALLY SUPPOSED. HE PREDICTED THAT NASRALLAH WOULD ACQUIESCE TO THE CREATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL (OVER SYRIA'S OBJECTIONS) SO LONG AS NASRALLAH ACCOMPLISHED HIS PRIMARY GOAL OF ACHIEVING A BLOCKING MINORITY IN THE GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, EL-KHOURY PREDICTED THAT HIZBALLAH WOULD REFRAIN FROM INITIATING VIOLENCE, NOT OUT OF ANY GOODWILL OR CONCERN FOR LEBANON'S INTERESTS, BUT BECAUSE NASRALLAH WAS CAREFULLY CULTIVATING HIS IMAGE IN THE BROADER ARAB WORLD. NASRALLAH HAD THEREFORE ORDERED HIS DEMONSTRATORS NOT TO START FIGHTS AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HAD DISPATCHED "MUSCLE" TO KEEP THE DEMONSTRATORS IN LINE. "HE'S GOT MORE MUSCLE ON THE STREETS THAN HE HAS DEMONSTRATORS. IN FACT, HE PROBABLY HAS MORE PEOPLE IN BEIRUT TO CURB THE DEMONSTRATIONS THAN THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES DO," SAID EL-KHOURY.
CORRUPTION THE KEY

14. (C) THE KEY TO DISCREDITING HIZBALLAH, EL-KHOURY

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CONTINUED, WAS TO BRING IT BACK INTO THE GOVERNMENT AND TO ASSIGN IT MINISTRIES (E.G., HOUSING) THAT WERE RIFE WITH CORRUPTION. HE PREDICTED THE COMBINATION OF THE RIGHT MINISTRIES AND LEBANON'S PERVASIVE "CULTURE OF CORRUPTION" WOULD QUICKLY TARNISH HIZBALLAH'S REPUTATION FOR HONESTY AND EFFICIENCY.
UNDERSTANDING THE AOUNISTS

15. (C) TURNING TO THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN HIZBALLAH AND FREE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT LEADER MICHEL AOUN, EL-KHOURY CLAIMED THAT WASHINGTON'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE ALLIANCE WAS BLURRED BY THE TEMPTATION TO VIEW PROBLEMS IN TERMS OF "GOOD GUYS" AND "BAD GUYS," WHICH HAD LED THE U.S. AND OTHERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO MISJUDGE AOUN'S SUPPORT AMONG THE CHRISTIAN

COMMUNITY. HE CLAIMED THAT AOUN HAD MOBILIZED SOME 100,000 CHRISTIAN DEMONSTRATORS OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST WEEK, A FIGURE HE SAID WAS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT GIVEN CALLS BY PATRIARCH SFEIR AND HIS GREEK ORTHODOX COUNTERPART FOR

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CHRISTIANS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS. (NOTE: WE DON'T KNOW THE SOURCE OF GHADYS ESTIMATE, BUT FRENCH ESTIMATES OF CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN MORE CIRCUMSPECT. PRESIDENT CHIRACS ADVISOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, DOMINIQUE BOCHE, OBSERVED TO US THAT MANY ALLEGED CHRISTIAN DEMONSTRATORS APPEARED TO BE BEARDED SHI'ITES WEARING ORANGE T-SHIRTS. END NOTE.) MOREOVER, EL-KHOURY CLAIMED THAT BERRI, NOT AOUN, WAS THE OBSTACLE TO SOME SORT OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE MARCH 14 FORCES AND FPM/AMAL.

16. (C) AS FOR THE LOGIC OF THE ALLIANCE ITSELF, EL-KHOURY SAID THAT AOUN'S BACKERS BELIEVED THAT ONLY AOUN HAD ESTABLISHED THE NECESSARY TRUST WITH NASRALLAH TO EVENTUALLY PERSUADE HIZBALLAH TO DISARM. MOREOVER, THEY BELIEVED THAT IF HIZBALLAH WERE TO BREAK WITH AOUN, THEN IT WOULD FINALLY BE "EXPOSED AS A BUNCH OF LIARS." POLOFF REBUTTED THESE ARGUMENTS AS ANCHORED IN WISHFUL THINKING AND PLAYING INTO HIZBALLAH'S STRATEGY OF STRINGING AOUN ALONG SO AS TO KEEP THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DIVIDED AND WEAK. EL-KHOURY, WHO WAS CLEARLY UNCOMFORTABLE AT BEING REMINDED OF HOW POORLY AOUN IS

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VIEWED IN WESTERN CAPITALS, CONCEDED THAT AOUN HAD "SUFFERED THE MOST" (IN TERMS OF LOSS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT) FROM THE ASSASSINATION OF INDUSTRY MINISTER PIERRE GEMAYEL. EL-KHOURY ALSO ADMITTED BEING UNCERTAIN WHETHER HIZBALLAH/SYRIA WOULD EVER ACQUIESCE TO AOUN BEING ELECTED PRESIDENT.

THE EL-KHOURY PLAN

17. (C) EL-KHOURY SUGGESTED ONE WAY OUT OF THE CURRENT LOGJAM WOULD BE FOR THE MARCH 14 LEADERS TO INVITE AOUN TO DESIGNATE ONE OF HIS OWN FOLLOWERS TO BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT (IN CONJUNCTION WITH AGREEMENTS ON LIMITING THE SCOPE OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL, GIVING THE MARCH 8 FORCES A BLOCKING MINORITY OF CABINET POSTS, AND REACHING AGREEMENT ON APPROVAL OF THE ELECTIONS LAW). EL-KHOURY SUGGESTED FARID AL-KHAZAN, DEAN OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN BEIRUT, WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT CANDIDATE. HE NOTED THAT AL-KHAZAN, A SPEAKER AT THE ORIGINAL MARCH 14 RALLY, ENJOYED AOUN'S TRUST YET MAINTAINED EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH PATRIARCH SFEIR, DRUZE LEADER WALID JUMBLATT, AND LEBANESE FORCES LEADER SAMIR JA'JA'.

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COMMENT

18. (C) WE REPORT EL-KHOURY'S COMMENTS NOT BECAUSE WE ARE PERSUADED BY HIS ANALYSIS OR HIS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, BUT TO ILLUSTRATE THE UNCOMFORTABLE INTELLECTUAL CONTORTIONS TO WHICH AT LEAST SOME AOUN SUPPORTERS ARE RESORTING IN THE WAKE OF THE GEMAYEL ASSASSINATION. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, WE THINK EL-KHOURY'S REASONING BOILS DOWN TO A CRUDE CALCULATION THAT BY SIDING WITH HIZBALLAH, AOUN -- WHATEVER HIS FAULTS -- IS BETTING ON THE WINNING SIDE.
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